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Author post-print (accepted) deposited by Coventry University's Repository

Original citation & hyperlink:

Geoghegan, BD & Kassung, C 2016, 'Friedrich A. Kittler, Professor' *Critical Inquiry*, vol 42, no. 4, pp. 963-977

<https://dx.doi.org/10.1086/686947>

DOI 10.1086/686947

ISSN 0093-1896

ESSN 1539-7858

Publisher: University of Chicago Press

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Friedrich A. Kittler, Professor

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October 2015

¹ The authors thank Lisa Åkervall, Anthony Enns, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Jussi Parikka, and Florian Sprenger for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay. Paul Michael Kurtz, not for the first (or last time), brought order to textual disarray. Tania Hron generously furnished us with hard-to-find texts from the Kittler papers in Berlin, and Paul Feigelfeld provided valuable information concerning the occasion and spirit of Kittler's final address. We especially thank Susanne Holl for allowing us to translate and comment upon "Farewell to Sophienstraße."

Friedrich A. Kittler, Professor

On the afternoon of July 15th, 2011, a sixty-eight-year-old Germanist delivered his final public address. A video of this address posted to YouTube depicts a man of slight size crossing a sparse stage and taking a seat at a flimsy coffee table.² His hands tap away at the surface of the table, his eyes dart about the room. When he leans forward, his suit and dress shirt seem to swallow up his meager frame. Amidst the clatter of background chatter and the indefinite clearing of throats, an assistant enters the frame from the left, exchanging the cup of water on the table for a glass of dark red wine. The man looks down at the wine and nods twice, affirmatively. That is enough. As if someone had flipped a switch, laughter and applause erupts from the audience, eliciting a bashful smile as well as gestures for calm from the septuagenarian. A simple and effective feedback circuit has transformed addresser and addressee. The frail Germanist transfigures into Professor Kittler. The rowdy crowd of two hundred onlookers, young and old, becomes an audience of rapt students. The lecture may begin.

This scene set the stage for the last academic lecture of Friedrich A. Kittler, “Farewell to Sophienstraße,” delivered on the occasion of his retirement from Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. It appears in print for the first time in this special section of *Critical Inquiry*.³ For readers who think of Friedrich A. Kittler as the great theorist of modern media technologies, these final remarks may serve as introduction—rather than coda—to the writer and his work. For years, anglophone translations and scholarship have privileged an interpretation of Kittler as a media theorist interested in how technological conditions shape cultural order. Attention to this aspect of his research highlights his interests in topics ranging from war technology and state bureaucracy through Pink Floyd and Thomas Pynchon to information theory and the computational models by Alan Turing.⁴ Yet overlooked is how, for Kittler, these instances named inflections in a much longer cultural history of (mostly European) reading and writing practices. Friedrich A. Kittler,

² See Stefan Höltgen, *Friedrich Kittler - Abschied von der Sophienstraße*, accessed September 2, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=csDCdqU-DGY>.

³ Cf. Axel Roch, “Hegel Is Dead: Miscellanea on Friedrich A. Kittler (1943-2011),” November 17, 2011, <http://www.heise.de/tp/artikel/35/35887/1.html>. Due to age restrictions Kittler was retired from his Lehrstuhl or Chaired Professorship in 2008, following two years in which he taught as a guest lecturer (in German academia the age constraints governing a guest lecturer are a little looser than a regular professor).

⁴ For an exceptional study that treats the wider scope of Kittler’s career, see Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, *Kittler and the Media* (2011: Polity, Malden).

writer, examined the semi-autonomous reading and writing of digital computers as one moment in the genealogy of elementary writing techniques that ran through (and regulated) ancient mathematics, romantic love, medieval theology, Napoleonic warfare, and strictures on civil pay in Prussia. Understanding the singularity of modern technology depended on an ability to situate its operations within these longer histories of informational and scriptural transmission. This inventory of rupture served as the prolegomenon to producing and even living new forms of historical continuity. These latter possibilities were chiefly investigated by Friedrich A. Kittler, professor (and student). These three assignments or addresses—author, professor, and student—are on display in this final lecture.

Addressing Sophienstraße

It is as both subject and object of just such inscription networks (*Aufschreibesysteme*) that Professor Kittler delivered “Farewell to Sophienstraße.” The location cited is Sophienstraße 22, the site of a dilapidated red brick *Altbau* in Berlin’s Mitte district, where in the early 1990s Friedrich Kittler co-founded what would become the Institute for Cultural History and Theory. In twenty-plus years of academic activity, “Sophienstraße”—as the site was known colloquially—nurtured an “invisible college” of cultural and media theorists that counted Annette Bitsch, Peter Berz, Hartmut Böhme, Wolfgang Hagen, Erich Hörl, Markus Krajewski, Thomas Macho, Claus Pias, Birgit Schneider, Bernhard Siegert, Ute Holl, and Christina Vagt among its members.⁵ Tania Hron and Paul Feigelfeld (longtime assistants to Professor Kittler) had convened the events of July 15th, 2011, to bid farewell to Sophienstraße in favor of improved facilities in new office buildings at Georgenstraße 47. This event coincided with the English-language publication of one of Kittler’s *Optical Media: Berlin Lectures 1999*, translated by Anthony Enns, and *Media Archaeology*, co-edited by then-resident scholar Jussi Parikka. Together, they marked a new stage in the international mainstreaming of a style of media analysis associated with the Berlin School of

⁵The term “invisible college” was first coined to refer from a community of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century scholars (sometimes called “The Republic of Letters”) bound together by the circulation of texts. See David A. Kronick, “The Commerce of Letters: Networks and ‘Invisible Colleges’ in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Europe,” *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 71, no. 1 (January 2001): 28–43. It seems no coincidence that Friedrich A. Kittler, who offered the first media-historical account of this system and its collapse (in *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*), spent his time as a professor cultivating a latter-day “invisible college” of his own. As we emphasize throughout the text, there is hardly a feature of Kittler’s conceptual and historical investigations that does not find a corollary exploration in his pedagogical activities as a university professor and educational practitioner.

Media Studies (*Medienwissenschaft*).⁶ Thus, the organizers invited Enns and Parikka to join a larger cast of Sophienstraße affiliates and alumni who would speak on the legacies of Sophienstraße, particularly as the source of an increasingly internationalized and professionalized discipline of media studies.

Yet the intellectual freight of the occasion came from its coincidence: it also marked the retirement of Friedrich A. Kittler, professor, from teaching at Sophienstraße. His opening declaration acknowledged as much, stating he would speak “directly to *you*...of Sophienstraße.” The two hundred auditors gathered together meant this designation encompassed current and former undergraduate and graduate students as well as professors, of course, but artists, engineers, and varied species of intellectual wanderers also numbered among the ranks. This audience, as much as the occasion or the site, transforms the kind of address Professor Kittler delivers. Even further, he announced that he would speak freely, without any notes, which intensifies the tendency of the address to become a situated pedagogical performance.

In phrasing intimate and intermittently halting, Professor Kittler defines education as the difficult task of “adjustment between the generations, to setting things straight.” He contrasts the affinities among linguistic, pedagogical, and sexual reproduction in the ancient Greek conceptions of tradition (*parádoxis*) with more recent efforts at educational standardization across the European Union. He cites the dissolution of German universities’ *Magister* degree in favor of more standard and EU-wide bachelor’s and master’s programs, “the Anglicization of knowledge.” The language employed is non-technical phrasing as, for example, when he refers to tradition as handing-down (*Weitergabe*) rather than the equally suitable but more technical term (*Übertragung*). He argues against the imposition of technical-bureaucratic standards on the classroom, celebrating instead the power of language, intersubjective relations, and intergenerational affinities to cultivate communities of thought. And he even delivers a short aside to condemn the recent adaptation by the university of gender-neutral and gender-inclusive pronouns to refer to students (*Studierende*) as surface signs of a more general “annihilation of knowledge.” He rails against these temptations towards a kind discursive universalism, declaring “the most and best that we know we can really only say (and thanks in part to Martin Heidegger) in our mother tongue (*Muttersprache*).”

These statements are not without a certain power to shock and discomfort. For one thing, there is the context of it all: a guest of honor speaking at an occasion that celebrates the long-

⁶ In print as Friedrich A. Kittler, *Optical Media: Berlin Lectures 1999*, trans. Anthony Enns (Malden: Polity Press, 2010); and Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka, eds., *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

awaited translation of his and a colleague's book into English do not customarily launch into a tirade against the bastardization of scholarship via international English, with his translator from North America and a colleague based in England about to take the stage. And then there is the profound intellectual assonance with the Kittler ca. 1978–1985, who never missed an opportunity to demolish German academia's pretensions. The Kittler that wrote *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* traced the rise of a German *Muttersprache*, the definition of the professor and the *Magister* student, and the ascent of gender binary roles as enmeshed features of an oppressive and controlling Prussian state of the “discourse network around 1800.”⁷ The author of that work advocated for the ruthless application of standard and impersonal technical norms of information theory and computing to the evaluation of literature, and he intermingled the jargon of French poststructuralism and North American communication engineering with magisterial German prose. How does a theorist with this kind of intellectual record end his career lamenting the waning of an authentic *Muttersprache*, the abolition of the *Magister* degree, the reform of gender binaries in language, and the imposition of impersonal bureaucratic standards to evaluation of culture and education?

There are a variety of ready-made psychologizing explanations that make sense of this last lecture, most of which pivot around the familiar figure of the Young Turk become an old reactionary. This reading sees in the late Kittler a sentimental man who mistakes the end of *his world* for the end of *the world*. Such explanations are comforting because they do-away with the difficulty and even strangeness of this lecture.⁸ They cast doubt on what otherwise has the trappings of a clear-eyed and unambiguous critique of the twenty-first-century university. (Perhaps, too, there is something reassuring in this reading for those who want to say “it's not so bad, there are plenty of opportunities to be had.”) We might call this explanation the “ironic exception” to the law of the discourse network: by leaning on psychology and sentimentality to explain away the late Kittler, it isolates to preserve the earlier Kittler who rejected all forms of psychology to produce a non-sentimental portrait of so-called man as nothing more than “the play between commands, addresses and data.”⁹

⁷ Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer and Chris Cullens (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

⁸ There is also the exquisite and profound reading of the late Kittler as an old man, where the term brings complexity and critique to bear on a text. See John Durham Peters, “Assessing Kittler's Musik und Mathematik,” in *Kittler Now: Current Perspectives in Kittler Studies*, ed. Stephen Sale and Laura Salisbury (Malden: Polity, 2015), 22–43.

⁹ Quote from Kittler's essay “City as Medium,” cited in Samuel Weber, “The Calculable and the Incalculable: Hölderlin After Kittler,” in *Media after Kittler*, ed. Eleni Ikoniadou and Scott Wilson (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 40.

A compelling alternative to psychologism—one recommended by Kittler himself—is discursivity. “Discursive manipulations are incisions,” implemented by a “network of technologies and institutions that allow a given culture to select, store, and process relevant data.”¹⁰ The discourse analyst offers a partial description of how historically specific institutions, technologies, and writing practices perpetually reshape messages according to the materials, standards, and political exigencies at hand. Despite Kittler’s fondness for tidy formalisms like selection/storage/processing, there is no general law of equivalence among these networks: words repeated diverge in their itinerary, while seemingly opposed statements transpose one and the same message. To shift the metaphor, there is no stepping in the same data flow twice. The discourse analyst learns to swim in this flow, charting its currents, staking out its eddies, following its path, and suggesting its “positive possibilities...within its limits.”¹¹

It is the discourse networks of education and university that most consistently pervaded the writing and professional life of Kittler, up to and including “Farewell to Sophienstraße.” Professor Kittler was an analyst of these operations, to be sure, but he was also a conscientious participant in their configuration. His activities, or more precisely his inscription, within this network operated along two chief axes. The first took place in his unrelenting focus on the analysis of education throughout his career as an academic author. The second concerned his role as student and later professor within the education system. “Farewell” marks the intersection of these two fields but shows the inability to define either without some referential recourse to the other.

Author/Student/Professor

Regarding the first axis, consider the first academic essay Kittler published, “Erziehung ist Offenbarung” (Education is Revelation), from 1978, which defined bourgeois child-rearing as the strategic control of reproduction by semiothechnical, scriptural, literary, and biological means.¹² While this analysis of techniques for governing the transition from one generation to another

¹⁰ This quotation is an example of just such an incision. See Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, 344 and 369.

¹¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Cornwall: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 44. This citation also functions as a nod to the “Afterword” in this volume by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and its emphasis on facticity and mythography as uncanny companions, staking out limits and possibilities in one and the same instance.

¹² My analysis is based on the 1991 reprint of this essay in Friedrich A. Kittler, *Dichter · Mutter · Kind* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1991), 19–45. I have not had the opportunity to carefully compare the original and republished version for possible modifications.

touches on all the major themes treated in “Farewell”—ancient Greek thought, philosophy, sexual reproduction, intergenerational strife, and quasi-mathematical formalism—the cool analytical distance strips these mechanisms of all affective appeal. Kittler radicalized this account of education-as-technics in his postdoctoral thesis, published in English as *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* (1984), which traced German Romanticism to the “elementary cultural techniques” (*elementare Kulturtechniken*) of reading taught by bourgeois mothers to their children.¹³ At the time, “cultural techniques” was a pedagogical term, which primarily designated instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic—a term rich with connotations of educational empowerment of the individual subject. Kittler preserved these educational connotations but reread them as impersonal techniques for the production of seemingly autonomous and literary selves favored by nineteenth-century German philosophers, poets, and administrators of the Prussian state.¹⁴ From the early 2000s onwards, Kittler worked closely with a wider community of colleagues in Berlin to define the entirety of the human sciences according to elementary cultural techniques for the symbolic manipulation of images, scripts, numbers, and sounds.¹⁵

More interesting perhaps is the central but systematically neglected role education plays in Kittler’s now-canonical writings on media technology. Consider his well-known account, in *Gramophone Film Typewriter*, of Friedrich Nietzsche’s experiments with a mechanical typewriter, encapsulated by the philosopher’s comment “[o]ur writing tools are also working on our thoughts.”¹⁶ This much of the story has become standard fare in the secondary literatures on Kittler and media archaeology.¹⁷ Less familiar is the conceptual spin Kittler offered by arguing that the typewriter marked a larger framework of reforms in education ca. 1900. In the narrative told by *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, the failure of the typewriter leads to its replacement by Lou

¹³ See Friedrich A. Kittler, *Aufschreibesysteme 1800 · 1900* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1995), 37. The official English translation refers to “acculturation techniques.” See Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, 27.

¹⁴ See Angela Fritz, *Lesen: Die Bedeutung der Kulturtechnik Lesen für den gesellschaftlichen Kommunikationsprozess* (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag, 1986).

¹⁵ For an overview of this late work, see Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan, “After Kittler: On the Cultural Techniques of Recent German Media Theory,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 6 (November 2013): 66–82. One of the earliest synthetic collections of statements on cultural techniques among Kittler and his colleagues is Sybille Krämer and Horst Bredekamp, eds., *Bild-Schrift-Zahl* (Munich: Fink, 2003). Texts from that collection in English translation include the introduction, Horst Bredekamp and Sybille Krämer, “Culture, Technology, Cultural Techniques — Moving Beyond Text,” ed. Ilinca Iurascu, Jussi Parikka, and Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 2013; and Friedrich Kittler’s essay Friedrich A. Kittler, “Number and Numeral,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 7/8 (December 2006): 51–61.

¹⁶ Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 200.

¹⁷ See, for example, Asa Briggs and Peter Burke, *Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), 12; Jussi Parikka, *What Is Media Archaeology* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 72; and Stephen Sale and Laura Salisbury, “Editors’ Introduction,” in *Kittler Now: Current Perspectives in Kittler Studies*, ed. Stephen Sale and Laura Salisbury (Malden: Polity, 2015), xxix.

Andreas-Salomé, who takes its place as the philosopher's personal scribe and his soon-to-be love interest. This substitution—made possible by the recent de-sexualization of admission policies at Germanophone universities, i.e. the admission of women—is the meaning of the typewriter, as an element that intertwined with the wider substitution of flesh and gender for ostensibly interchangeable, depersonalized writing instruments.¹⁸

While the writings on media technology by Kittler between 1984 and 1994 may constitute his most remarkable (certainly his most *remarked upon*) intellectual output, the problem of education stands out as his most consistent and enduring topic of investigation. In this larger set of *essais* (of which the media technological writings are only an especially powerful subset), neutral procedures for the universal processing of facts, students, datum, disciplines, and gender became legible as contingent strategies of powers. The late Kittler in “Farewell” expresses such concern over the annihilation of knowledge, which proves rather striking given the earnestness with which some of his own professors and supervisors levied the same change against his own work. In 1982 the professors charged with evaluating his *Habilitationsschrift* (and by extension grant or deny him the right to hold a professorship in Germany), later published as *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, disagreed as to whether it could be accepted as a legitimate contribution to university knowledge. One evaluator commented, “Rarely in a habilitation thesis has the university and its representatives (who have yet to complete its evaluation) been honored with so much scorn as by Kittler.”¹⁹ Another referee, Hans-Martin Gauger, suggested the thesis under consideration “does not correspond to the genre of writing known as ‘Habilitationsschrift.’ More generally and precisely, it is devoid of scientific discourse. What lays before us is extra-scientific discourse and, to some extent, is not even rational discourse.”²⁰

Something remarkable emerged within the attempts to evaluate Kittler's *Habilitationsschrift*, which turns our discourse analysis from Kittler the author to Kittler as student and professor. The investigation of scientific neutrality that pervaded nearly every page of the text jumped off the page and began playing out among the committee itself, circulating as state-sanctioned documents authored by one professor, passed to another, responded to by a third, all the while regulated according to the laws governing university procedures in Baden-Württemberg, home to

¹⁸ Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 209–210.

¹⁹ Submitted in 1982 but later published as Gottfried Schramm, “Gutachten zur Habilitationsschrift von Friedrich A. Kittler: Aufschreibesysteme[!] 1800/1900,” *Zeitschrift für Medienwissenschaft* 6, no. 1 (2012): 155. My translation. The typo and the exclamation in brackets appear in the printed and publicly disseminated version of the text, cited here.

²⁰ Hans-Martin Gauger, “Gutachten Zur Arbeit «Aufschreibesysteme 1800/1900» von Herrn Dr. F. A. Kittler,” *Zeitschrift Für Medienwissenschaft* 6, no. 1 (2012): 145.

the University of Freiburg. The referee report of Manfred Schneider took the extraordinary step of commenting almost exclusively on Gauger's report. "If Mr. Kittler's habilitation thesis presents an affront to the usual practices and order of scientific discourse," he wrote, "so it is that this indicting review by my colleague Gauger must be regarded as a parody of that which it is trying to save: rational debate."²¹ The contentious debate among committee members over what constituted valid educational investigation led to the extraordinary solicitation of eleven (instead of the usual three) expert reviews before a majority of the committee could finally decide to legitimate the *Habilitationsschrift*.²²

These difficulties evaluating *Aufschreibesysteme 1800-1900*, its ultimate acceptance, and its emergence as the academic equivalent of a bestseller a couple years later are an index of a profound and irreversible transformation in the discourse network of education, especially as it had existed in Germany. Posed at its most basic level, the problem was how words and students were to be processed by German educational systems in the latter half of the twentieth century. As a young boy in the village of Rochlitz, Kittler lived among pedagogical techniques dating to the nineteenth-century. He could recite extensive passages of Goethe, thanks to a rote discursive drilling at the hands of his father.²³ The Allied bombing of Dresden, persecution of the family by East German apparatchiks, and flight of the family in 1958 to capitalist West Germany (then in the throes the *Wirtschaftswunder*) could not shake the authority of Goethe and the importance of its mastery by rote educational technique in the Kittler household, and instruction at a prestigious *Gymnasium* ensured smooth transition to the university apparatus charged with continuing his instruction.²⁴ In 1963 Kittler enrolled in Romance Languages, German, and Philosophy at Albert-Ludwigs University in Freiburg, where he would remain in various capacity as student and lecturer for nearly twenty-five years.²⁵

Although the Allies may have finished the first stage of their assault on Germany in 1945, the German universities did not feel the full force of invasion for another thirty or forty years. Certainly after the war, professors were sacked, trials held, and apologies written, but in many respects this process served to isolate, expel, and ultimately sustain the integrity and prestige of

²¹ Submitted in 1982 but later published as Manfred Schneider, "Gutachten zur Habilitationsschrift von Herrn Dr. F. A. Kittler «Aufschreibesysteme 1800/1900»," *Zeitschrift für Medienwissenschaft* 6, no. 1 (2012): 145.

²² For a detailed account and analysis of these events, see Florian Sprenger, "Academic Networks 1982/2015: The Provocations of a Reading," forthcoming in *Grey Room*.

²³ See Winthrop-Young, *Kittler and the Media*, 11.

²⁴ I have drawn these and other biographical details from *ibid.*, 8–27.

²⁵ Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Nicholas Gane, "Friedrich Kittler: An Introduction," *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 7/8 (December 2006): 6–7.

the German university. In the humanistic disciplines more relevant to the present discussions, German Marxist thought (represented by affiliates of the Frankfurt School) and literary hermeneutics embodied two efforts to respond to the challenges of World War II. To offer a very brief and polemical summary, these two non-exclusive formations converged in their attempts to reconstruct and preserve intellectual modes dating back to the nineteenth century, which had acquired tremendous prestige in German academic contexts. So, too, they sought to advance a humanistic universalism, be it through left-wing politics or the textual depths of the literary sublime. The Frankfurt School (esp. under the influence of Jürgen Habermas) implemented a post-World War II program of humanist rationality whereas literary hermeneutics pursued the even more audacious task of sustaining a pre-World War I humanist rationality.²⁶

The task of interrogating the foundations and horizons of these intellectual programs fell to *Aufschreibesysteme 1800 · 1900* which acted as a madcap switchboard for analyzing the discourse network “around 1980” as much or more so than those around 1800 or 1900.²⁷ In the 1970s, Kittler found a resource in the opening up not only of the German university but also to Western intellectual life in general insofar as transient, translational modes of analysis variously known as semiotics, structuralism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism offered a radical—in the sense of not simply changing programs but going to the very root of an existing—challenge. In the writings of Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan, the young Kittler discovered modes of reading that treated canonical German thinkers such as Hegel, Nietzsche, and Freud with reverence even as it freed their thought to new stakes in language, gender, identity, ethnicity, and nation. In borrowing heavily from structural linguistics and cybernetics, these new French thinkers also introduced a radically new jargon that clashed awkwardly with the deep striving and rational thinking of classical German *Geisteswissenschaften* [humanities].²⁸ The willingness of more semiotically-inclined thinkers such as Barthes and Eco to intermingle the analysis of high- and low-culture with an uncompromising *joie de vivre* invited a stark contrast to the unrelenting

²⁶ This account of postwar German intellectual culture, and the implicit contrast with an emergence culture of “French theory,” offers a liberal interpretation of comments made in Martin Schwab, “Foreword,” in *What Is Neostructuralism?* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1989), xlv – xlv, especially on the purported contrasts between postwar German rationalism and postwar French irrationalism.

²⁷ I borrow the notion of a discourse network “around 1980” [um 1980] in part from Ute Holl and Claus Pias, “Editorische Vorbemerkung,” *Zeitschrift für Medienwissenschaft* 6, no. 1 (2012): 114–15.

²⁸ On French theory, structural linguistics, and cybernetics, see Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan, “From Information Theory to French Theory: Jakobson, Lévi-Strauss, and the Cybernetic Apparatus,” *Critical Inquiry* 38, no. 1 (2011): 96–126.

earnestness and sincerity of German academia.²⁹ To incorporate these new modes of thought into the life of the German university, then, did not simply entail an introduction of new ideas or concepts into an otherwise stable field of cognition; even more, these concepts redistributed that way of life, to put it into relay with networks that upset its smooth-operating procedures for the production of knowledge, students, and texts. In so doing, poststructuralism skirted the dictates of academic Marxism and hermeneutics, which offered bright and progressive futures by covert collusion with or even affirmation of the institutions implicated in the disasters of World War II (language, the state, official hierarchies).

In this expanded field of associations and exchanges, the contentious evaluation of Kittler's *Habilitationsschrift* tells us less about the content of the work than the singular privilege that the text, its author, and its reviewers had in bringing their finger tips, keyboard, professional routines, and familiar concepts into the throes of a larger shift in educational procedure. Their comments display their at-best partial cognizance of the discursive reorganization embedding their words and actions. *Aufschreibesysteme 1800 · 1900* and its reception records the friction of this transition. Submitted five years earlier, *Aufschreibesysteme 1800 · 1900* would have met with swift rejection. Submitted five years later, its acceptance and celebration might have been no less swift. The power of the work to disturb readers and excite intellectual change measures its arrival amidst a larger, more decisive reworking of educational system, one the author proved ready and able to describe through historical studies of the university, family, literature, and state as relays enmeshed in a single—and disturbingly cold—model of structure.³⁰ Conversely, the target at which it aimed—the postwar West German university—was living a kind of borrowed time, practicing cultural techniques of another era. It was thus the fragile state of the university and its programs, the brittleness of the humanistic program, the continued dissolution of classical oppositions between elite and vernacular cultures, the rise of powerful nomad conceptual movements, and the proliferation of new jargons that significantly enabled *Aufschreibesysteme 1800 · 1900* to affect its readers. This expanded account of the work's efficacy squares with that of Kittler and his professors, who seemed roundly taken aback by this shy and withdrawn aspiring Germanist, who, though apparently eager to please his professors, could cause such a fuss.³¹ However, mere acceptance of the habilitation registered how the discursive-pedagogical change

²⁹ See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972); and Umberto Eco, *Misreadings*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego: Harvest, 1993).

³⁰ On the cold model of structure, see Christoph Weinberger, "The Cold Model of Structure: Friedrich Kittler Interviewed by Christoph Weinberger," *Cultural Politics* 8, no. 3 (November 2012): 375–84.

³¹ See, for example, Hans-Martin Gauger, "Nachwort," *Zeitschrift Für Medienwissenschaft* 6, no. 1 (2012): 188–90.

was already en route to becoming an historical phenomenon and, as such, suitable for recognition as a contribution to the cultural sciences. His rapid ascent to the heights of influence and power, first in the German university and then in England and the United States, is another such register.

Discourse Network 2011

We now have an partial outline of the (1) positive possibilities, (2) within limits, (3) defined by an historically specific conjecture of institutions, technologies, and writing practices. Together these elements comprise a skeleton of the discourse network wherein Friedrich A. Kittler—author, student, and professor—intervened. In the closing remarks, we will attempt to extend that history to the university discourse networks of the recent present, which Professor Kittler addresses in “Farewell to Sophienstraße” address, but which also enunciate “Farewell to Sophienstraße” through the conceptual persona Friedrich A. Kittler, professor.³²

One continuity concerns the tendency of Kittler—as author, student, and professor—to take up and hold a *point de repère* close enough to educational struggles to describe their operations, but removed enough to limit his own exposure to marginal skirmishes. Such tactics have their hazards, as the near termination of a nascent academic career in the *Habilitation* proceedings indicate, but for the most part facilitated the work of Friedrich A. Kittler. This activity of tactical positioning should not be confused with the mere “taking of positions” that Kittler regarded as anti-intellectualism moralism endemic to present-day cultural and humanistic investigation. Where the former mode of position-taking intervenes in a highly complex situation, with tools and tactics adapted to (and of) the battle at hand, ready to accept reversal and even contradictions in the name of the battle, Kittler felt that the latter mode of “taking positions” endeavors to carve out a sphere of righteous truth that insists on its relative transcendence from contingent values at hand. “Farewell” pursues this former, militaristic approach to position-taking, turning its attention towards the German university ca. 2011, and celebrates *Sophienstraße* as a site for this activity. In this context, Professor Kittler’s laudatory remarks regarding *Sophienstraße* strikes against the abolition of the *Magister* celebrate this spirit of struggle and position-taking, in a perpetual struggle against the institutional annihilation of thought. In this context, the *Magister* degree

³² This term and notion of the “conceptual persona” is drawn from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 61–83.

Kittler handily dismissed in the 1980s as an instrument wielded by the Discourse Network 1800 is reborn as an instrument to be wielded against the Discourse Network 2011.

Professor Kittler's seemingly ad hominem attacks on gender-neutral language also fit within a longer program of interrogating the modes of universalism promised by bureaucratic authority. The condemnation against the awkward neologism *Studierende*, a purportedly all-inclusive category that can process students regardless of sex, elaborates this long-running skepticism about efforts to neutralize difference through bureaucratic controls (a concern also registered by many anglophone academics' ambivalence over "trigger warnings"). The point is not to defend an earlier language or set of binary positions persuasively deconstructed thirty years earlier in Kittler's *Habilitationsschrift* but rather to warn against the celebration of its replacement by a new bureaucratic form that masks—rather than confronting—the social and political contradictions. This mode of skepticism finds its closest antecedents in Nietzsche's warnings that universal education amounts to a flattening out of knowledge by the supposedly universal arbitrations of governments, churches, and academies.³³ Such critiques remain difficult for present-day readers to absorb, as their call for perpetual vigilance about all-inclusive spheres is ill-fitted to the modern liberal state and its promised to serve as a *stato neutrale ed agnostico*, adjudicating difference through a bureaucratic apparatus of techno-juridical mediation.³⁴ This line of analysis fits within a larger unrecognized program of anti-technological determinism that pervaded the genealogy of technics, including its more subtle expressions in modern liberal thought. The careful reader of Professors Nietzsche and Kittler find these interrogations coextensive with a search for latent possibilities that are already within a concrete situation but inaccessible to institutional policies. In "Farewell," Kittler suggests antiquated terms such as *studentes* and *baccalaureate* as more richer alternatives embedded with already existing traditions. These particular suggestions are not persuasive but their great critical interest lies in their modeling of genealogical approach to the problem of freedom, mired in the constraints of a history that will never stop being our own, and entirely stripped of dubious appeals to a progressive and future-oriented liberation.

But then, of course, there is the rupture: The tone and program outlined in "Farewell to Sophienstraße" registers a gap between the university discourse networks of 1981 and 2011, as

³³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazca, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 85.

³⁴ On the *stato neutrale ed agnostico*, see Carl Schmitt, "The Age of Neutralizations and Depolitizations," in *The Concept of the Political*, trans. M. Konzett and John P. McCormick (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 88.

unbridgeable as that which separated 1800 and 1900. By 2011, the hermeneutic university has fallen, the German *Magister* system disappeared, and poststructuralism (as Kittler remarked in a 2006 interview) has become “a kind of worldwide industry.”³⁵ In the early 1980s Kittler envisioned a style of analysis that would exorcise the spirits haunting the human sciences—what he called an *Austreibung des Geistes aus den Geisteswissenschaften*.³⁶ Instead politicians and university administrators put spirit up for sale—a tactic that withers the spirit with more cunning and efficacy than any genealogical critique. In Germany as in many other contexts, this alternative program of reform entails abbreviating the time-to-degree-completion, accelerating the accumulation of practical skills, incorporating internships into study, and preparing *Studierende* for success in a competitive, global marketplace. The austere university fortresses around 1980 have given way to engines for the accelerated circulation of students, degrees, discourses, and internationalization. In brief, the description of the university as a vast technical machine made by Friedrich Kittler, student, around 1980 has gone from shocking to banal.

Closely related to this process is a strange circuit of mimicry, whereby germanophone universities strive to more approximate the circuitry of private American universities (with the latter having been founded in the 1800s on the model of the German research university). This process is most clear in the new models of funding, administration, and employment introduced into German universities since the 1990s. Throughout much of the postwar period West German universities “suffered” from the “problem” of relative equality, with shared standards, funding, and opportunities afforded highly diverse institutions. As an observer from the American Association for the Advancement of Sciences explains, “Germany is unusual among most western nations in that all of its universities have been designed to be roughly equal in both quality and prestige...[This] strategy has arguably prevented Germany from producing world-class institutions that can effectively compete with those in other countries.”³⁷ New policies correct this unusually uniform system of equality and prestige by introducing external funding, precarious employment, and the concentration of funding in so-called “excellence university” that can better compete in the global scientific marketplace. Enthusiastic commentators label this the

³⁵ John Armitage, “From Discourse Networks to Cultural Mathematics: An Interview with Friedrich A. Kittler,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 7–8 (December 1, 2006): 22.

³⁶ Friedrich A. Kittler, ed., *Austreibung des Geistes aus den Geisteswissenschaften: Programme Des Poststrukturalismus* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1980).

³⁷ Gretchen Vogel, “A German Ivy League Takes Shape,” Text, *American Association for the Advancement of Science*, (October 13, 2006), <http://news.sciencemag.org/education/2006/10/german-ivy-league-takes-shape>.

creation of a new “Ivy League” network of universities within Germany.³⁸ This transformation is particularly evident in the germanophone discipline of media studies [*Medienwissenschaft*], which has proven most adept at presenting itself as highly responsive to the scientific and technical demands of the present.³⁹ Across Germany, the most celebrated former students of the late Friedrich Kittler have accepted prestigious appointments overseeing international programs, centers, and research networks supported by “third-party funding” from entities such as the European Union, the Volkswagen Foundation, and the German Research Foundation. In well-appointed offices funded by these foundations, professors and their postdoctoral “employees” may speak with one another in German, but when the doors open and the international guests arrive a mixture of international English and post-national “theory” serves as the universal discursive translator. Administrators compile annual and semi-annual reports tally up the various outputs (guests hosted, talks delivered, peer reviewed papers published, etc.), in hopes that another year or two of funding may prove forthcoming. In this way the accelerated circulation of students, degrees, discourses, and internationalization implemented on the undergraduate and graduate population is reproduced among faculty members who challenged to perpetually improve their methods, accelerate their outputs, and ensure the exchangeability of their work (across languages, institutions, review committees, and so on).⁴⁰ The charismatic authority exercised by the Discourse Network 1980, based on face-to-face encounters and publicly available referee reports, does not cease to exist. After all, habilitation committees continue to meet and write their reports, but their completion has become “optional” as alternate routes to a professorship have emerged in Germany. In the Discourse Network 2011 a perpetual chain of non-hermeneutic, impersonal registers and anonymous, non-public evaluations displaces charismatic authority, wherein access to external funding and international visibility become the new gold standard for securing permanent appointments.

38 See *ibid.*; and Gretchen Vogel, “Germany Names New Top Universities,” Text, *American Association for the Advancement of Science*, (June 15, 2012), <http://news.sciencemag.org/europe/2012/06/germany-names-new-top-universities>. The precarity is not mentioned in either article. However, it is the necessary result, as these programs substitute an earlier generation of mid-term and permanent appointments for appointments unpredictably renewed according to grant renewals.

39 For Kittler’s late skepticism towards *Medienwissenschaft*, see Antje Wegwerth, “Rock Me, Aphrodite,” *Telepolis*, May 24, 2006, <http://www.heise.de/tp/artikel/22/22695/1.html>.

40 Martin Heidegger describes this as the rise of science-as-research, and research as ongoing activity, undertaken not by scholars but instead by research men who attend meetings, collect information, and write reports. See Martin Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture,” *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 115–54.

The transformations enacted in the Discourse Network around 2011 are the stuff of paperwork, data, numbers, and digits, in their manipulation and measurement, in their circulation and transformation. The Kittler best known and most beloved my anglophone readers, i.e. “Friedrich A. Kittler, media theorist,” offered a pretty good toolbox for describing this kind of discursive system. He did not, however, offer much countering or critiquing its operations. This marks is a change. Freiburg the Discourse Network 1980 found itself pushed to its limits by *Aufschreibesysteme 1800 · 1900*, with professors of good reputation compelled to bicker via memo over the basic meaning of the term “to habilitate,” well aware that their decision could well reverberate across the *Geisteswissenschaften*. Referee Hans-Martin Gauger stated the problem clearly and directly: “I fear that by recognizing this work, set a far-reaching [weitreichender] precedent will have been set.”⁴¹ In overruling his strongest objections, the habilitation ensured that Gauger’s prediction became reality. By 2011, however, the parapet that once served as the *point de repère* of Friedrich A. Kittler, student, had been overrun and occupied by the very forces whose operations he once sought to describe. And so Friedrich A. Kittler, professor, took up a new position. As he explained in in a 2007 interview, “A good acquaintance of mine once asked me, ‘What is the difference between *Discourse Networks* and [your late work on the ancient Greeks, titled] *Music and Mathematics*?’ And I said, ‘The former was a knife; the latter is a fork.’ I mean, you cannot go on biting the hands of the teachers and predecessors that feed you and then finally your own.”⁴² A new circuit prevailed. Former targets became improbable allies. Academic pomp and circumstance disdained on the page became an occasion for putting the false universalisms on hold and dwelling, for a moment, in a space of historical singularity.

The name for this singular space was Sophienstraße. There, Kittler’s longstanding fascination with the university classroom as a play of forces developed into something more joyful and even more hopeful than anything that appears in *Discourse Networks*. For the late Professor the classroom might function as a theater of juridically specified civil service, but it could just as well serve as a theater, a confessional, a stage, a laboratory, an IT center, a royal court, and—of course—a smoker’s lounge. Perhaps he sounds a bit nostalgic in saying good-bye to that space but only because he already knows such spaces cannot be preserved, institutionalized, or universalized. They must be fought for and won, again, in perpetuity. His final address expresses

41 Hans-Martin Gauger, “Stellungnahme (Sondervotum) Zur Arbeit von F. A. Kittler «Aufschreibesysteme 1800/1900»,” *Zeitschrift Für Medienwissenschaft* 6, no. 1 (2012): 188.

42 Weinberger, “The Cold Model of Structure: Friedrich Kittler Interviewed by Christoph Weinberger,” 376.

the hope that his students will find joy in creating such spaces for themselves, as well as the bitter expectation that they will not.